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The Princeton Theological Review

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orthodoxy as received from the Old and New Testaments and
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Prolegomena

As my father and I worked in the blazing Phoenix summer heat, I knew “the question” was coming. As the morning progressed, we talked about the in’s and out’s of the construction site we were on, the previous night’s ball game and the blazing summer heat, but all along I knew it (“the question”) was coming. Finally, after an extended silence my father spoke up, “So Aaron, what did you learn this year in college?”

Every summer, when I came home from college, I worked for my father. And every summer, at some point on the first day of work, my father would ask what I learned over the past academic year. I remember how surprised and overwhelmed I was that first time I answered Dad’s question. I rambled on, trying to compress a year of liberal arts into a single conversation. However, over the course of our conversation that afternoon I began to realize Dad just wanted to know was if I had learned anything *important*. He wanted to know if there was anything particularly significant in the liberal arts education I was receiving.

After each year my father and I would go through that same ritual. And each year my answer became more carefully thought out than the one before. Throughout the year I would often ask myself, “How will I get this across to my Dad? What will he think about this? Does what I’m learning apply to him at all? Can I convince him this is significant in real life?”

I eventually completed my undergraduate degree, and currently am working toward my second graduate degree in theology. I don’t get to go home for the summer anymore, but when I do visit, I usually work a day or two with my Dad and he still asks, “So, what (of significance) are you learning in school?” Unfortunately, it often seems like the more education I receive, the harder it is to answer Dad’s question. The academy is often guilty of generating copious amounts of information leaving much to be desired in the way of profundity and significance. The world of academics is full of scholarship laudable in terms of erudition and breathtakingly precise in nature, yet it causes some to ask, “Does it really matter?”

I do not mean to suggest all scholarship should be so simple that anyone could readily understand it. It would be ludicrous to dismiss Kant simply for being difficult. Complexity and difficulty in scholarship are a part of the territory. However, scholarship should always offer a sense of significance—it should matter. Scholarship ought not to be an end in itself, but produced in service of greater realities.

We at PTR are committed to publishing scholarship significant and beneficial to the life of the church. As an editor I am constantly asking, “Could I convince my Dad this article is necessary and valuable?” We feel this issue definitely clears that bar. While each of our three articles are quite different in content and style, they are all related to foundational Christian concerns.

The first article, by John Kearney, confronts one of the most important questions in theology: “What is the nature of humanity’s problem of sin?” Kearney looks at Jonathan Edwards’s treatment of the imputation of Adam’s Sin, an often-neglected topic in modern theology. The second article, by Teresa Latini, addresses an aspect of the persistent question: “How shall Christians live?” Ms. Latini responds to the actions of last summer’s PCUSA General Assembly concerning homosexual ordination. The third article, by Dean Overman and Hubert Yockey, uniquely approaches the question: “How did we human beings get here?” Their work deals with Information Theory and its implications on our ability, or lack thereof, to account for the origins of life through our present scientific laws.

In our opinion, these articles reflect excellent scholarship. But even more importantly, they represent *significant* scholarship—even scholarship my Dad would be proud of.

AARON MESSNER
General Editor

Jonathan Edwards and the Imputation of Adam's Sin

by John Kearney

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

Romans 5:19

Romans 5: 12–19 is one of the most intriguing passages in the New Testament. Among other things, Paul claims that Adam's sin was somehow imputed to his posterity.¹ The condition labeled "original sin" is ultimately traceable to the first evil inclination that welled up in Adam's soul, the inclination to eat the forbidden fruit.

The idea that one man's sin, along with the guilt that attends it, can be imputed to others is, to say the least, controversial. Many Christians embrace the notion without question. Others, both inside and outside the Christian community, scoff at the idea that the sin and guilt of one human being can in any way be transferred to another. William Wainwright notes that "I may be ashamed for my father, assume responsibility for the consequences of his behavior, and yet not accept blame for it."² The President may assume responsibility for the actions of his chief of staff without being responsible for them: "The fact that people are sometimes ashamed for others, or assume responsibility for the results of their behavior, or incur legal and non-legal consequences because of it does not show that they believe themselves to be, or are, guilty of another's conduct."³

Liability, then, is distinct from guilt. Thus, unless Adam and his posterity are, in some sense, one, his descendants cannot be guilty of his sin.

Jonathan Edwards was keenly aware of this point. In Part IV, Chapter III of *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758) Edwards argues for the "reasonableness, of such a constitution, by which Adam and his posterity should be looked upon as one, and dealt with accordingly, in an affair of such infinite consequence."⁴ Taking an opposite stance, the Rev. John Taylor, Edwards' Arminian antagonist, claimed that "Adam and his posterity are *not one*, but entirely *distinct agents*." (OS 394) Taylor believed that imputing Adam's sin to entirely distinct individuals was unreasonable and unjust.

The purpose of this article is to determine whether Edwards provides a coherent and adequate solution to the imputation problem. I will (i) set a context for the discussion by briefly examining two major accounts of the imputation of Adam's sin, viz., the realist view and the federal view, (ii) analyze what Edwards says on the matter, and (iii) assess the objections of three of Edwards's critics (Paul Helm, Philip Quinn, and Charles Hodge).

The Realist and the Federal Views of Imputation

Most systematic theologians distinguish between two major accounts of the imputation of Adam's sin, viz., the realist view and the federal or representative view. Thomas Aquinas captures the essence of the realist view.

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All who are born of Adam can be considered one man by reason of sharing the one nature inherited from the first parent, even as in political matters all belonging to one community are reckoned to be like one body, and the whole community like one person. Porphyry also states that by sharing in the species men are one.⁵

On the realist view you and I share a common nature with Adam. Indeed, we inherit that nature from him. The human race is *really* 'in' Adam as a species is in its first member. As members of the human race you and I participate in Adam's nature such that

when Adam sinned, you and I sinned, and so the reason you and I are guilty is that you and I sinned in Adam, and are born, that is, become individual substances, as having sinned in Adam.⁶

The federal or representative view is commonly associated with Reformed covenantal theology. Charles Hodge captures the essence of this view.

Adam was the type of Him who was to come, because as the one was the representative of his race, so the other is the representative of his people. And the consequences of the relation are shown to be in like manner analogous. It was because Adam was the representative of his race, that his sin is the judicial ground of their condemnation; and it is because Christ is the representative of his people, that his righteousness is the judicial ground of the justification of believers.⁷

On Hodge's account God designates or appoints Adam to be the "representative of his race," just as he appoints Christ to be "the representative of his people." The human race falls when Adam sins; those who trust in Christ are justified by his work on the cross. Adam's sin is imputed to us insofar as he is our representative; Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers insofar as, through the act of saving faith, they trust in him as their savior and lord.

There is a clear difference, then, between the realist and the federal view. On the realist account there is no difference between Adam's nature and my nature and their metaphysical sameness is the ground of the inherited guilt. On the federal view Adam is the legally appointed representative of his descendants and thus "his sin is the judicial ground of their condemnation." The realist view is based on the metaphysics

of a common human nature; the federal view rests on a juridical foundation.

Edwards' view

I. The Doctrine of Temporal Parts

As a Calvinist theologian and preacher one would expect Edwards to embrace the federal view. Paul Helm claims that Edwards does not accept either the realist or the federal view. I agree with Helm's claim, as long as we confine ourselves to Edwards' position in *Original Sin*. While Edwards does refer to Adam as the appointed "moral head of his posterity" (OS 395) who "stood as a public person, or common head" (OS 396) I believe that, in the final analysis, Edwards wants to establish a metaphysical rather than a juridical basis for the *oneness* of Adam and his descendants.

Helm contends that Edwards "applies the doctrine of temporal parts to explain and justify the relationship between Adam and his posterity."⁸ Roderick Chisholm agrees with this interpretation. He claims that Edwards appeals to the doctrine of temporal parts "to show that it is as just to attribute Adam's sins to you and me now as it is to attribute any other past

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produce existence. So in one
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twenty years ago.***

sins to you and me now."⁹ Edwards' version of the doctrine of temporal parts involves three metaphysical theses, viz., (i) present created realities exist for only an instant and are not numerically identical from moment to moment, (ii) there is a clear difference between the way present created things *appear* and the way they *really* are, and (iii) past created things are not causally efficacious. A temporal part is anything that exists or lasts for only a moment. Think of an object that appears to exist for ten moments. Since

the tenth temporal part resembles (is *qualitatively* identical with) the ninth temporal part, the ninth with the eighth, the eighth with the seventh, etc., we are inclined to believe that the object persists or continues to exist uninterruptedly for ten moments. But it doesn't. The object at moment 10 is diverse from the object at moment 9, the object at moment 9 is diverse from the object at moment 8, and so on. An object may appear to continue to exist as the same individual for ten moments, but it is really composed of ten very similar temporal parts. Edwards claims that the only way numerically diverse temporal things become one and the same is if God treats them as if they were one and the same. He contends that God, in fact, views Adam and his posterity in this way. Thus, when Adam sins and incurs guilt so does every other member of the human race.

The notion that created things exist for only a moment entails that the past is not causally efficacious. Edwards employs several examples to illustrate and defend this thesis.

Appealing to the thesis that "what is *past* entirely ceases, when *present* existence begins" (OS 400), Edwards claims, for example, that it is impossible for the moon of a moment ago to produce the presently existing moon. What is non-existent cannot produce existence. So in one sense there is no difference between the moon of a moment ago and the moon of twenty years ago. Neither moon has any real existence. The present moon exists for only a moment and relies on God to preserve it in being. Thus, the divine upholding "is perfectly equivalent to a continued creation, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence." (OS 401)

Edwards also employs the example of seeing an image in a mirror or other glass object. As rays of light are reflected on to the mirror I see an image of myself. If I place an object (e.g., a large book) between my face and the mirror, the image no longer exists. So the *past existence* of the image cannot preserve itself in being, even "for one moment." If I remove the object and look at myself in the mirror again, the image that I see "is altogether new-made every moment" (OS 403-404, n5). In short, the present image is not numerically the same as the immediate past image.

In No. 267 of *The "Miscellanies,"* Edwards adds a

third example to bolster his claim about the causal inefficacy of the past: "here is a new thought, and there is a necessity of a cause. It is not antecedent thoughts, for they are vanished and gone; they are past, and what is past is not."¹⁰ Edwards believes that what is true of the "presently existing moon," the "present image" and the "new thought" is true of the rest of creation.

In this sense, the continuance of the very being of the world and all its parts, as well as the manner of continued being, depends entirely on an arbitrary constitution: for it don't all *necessarily* follow, that because there was sound, or light, or color, or resistance, or gravity, or thought, or consciousness, or any other dependent thing the last moment, that therefore there shall be the like at the next. (OS 404)

The "arbitrary constitution" mentioned in this passage refers to God's constituting an identity between presently existing things and their temporal antecedents. The sound that I hear at the present moment is similar to the sound I heard a moment ago but God treats them *as if* they were one and the same sound.

Edwards' notion that created things are in a state of "constant flux, ever passing and returning" harkens us back to the Heraclitean dictum that one cannot step into the same river twice (OS 404). However, Edwards takes the Heraclitean dictum a step further by linking it to the doctrine of *continua creatio*: created things are "renewed every moment, as the colors of bodies are every moment renewed by the light that shines upon them; and all is constantly proceeding from God, as light from the sun." (OS 404)

II. Divinely Constituted Identity

Edwards contends that all created oneness or identity "depends on the sovereign constitution and law of the Supreme Author and Disposer of the universe." (OS 397) Some things, though "entirely distinct, and very diverse" are yet "so united by the established law of the Creator.... that by virtue of that establishment it is with them as if they were one." (OS 397) His examples include the identity of the grown tree with the plant having only the initial sprout, the identity of a forty year old human body with an infant body, and the union of soul and body. The atoms that compose the grown tree are not numerically the same atoms as those that compose the plant with the initial sprout,

any more than the atoms that compose the forty year old human body are the same as those in the infant's body, yet God, according to divinely established laws of nature, treats them *as if* they are numerically *one* tree and numerically *one* body. Edwards adds that, in the case of the union of soul and body, God has established "a wonderful mutual communication" such that soul and body "become different parts of the very same man." (OS 398)

Edwards thinks that Locke is partially correct in rooting personal identity in the *same consciousness or memory*, but "'tis evident, that the communication or continuance of the same consciousness and memory to any subject, through successive parts of duration, depends wholly on a divine establishment." (OS 398) Though I am not numerically the same person from moment to moment (i.e., "through successive parts of duration") God communicates to me at the present moment the memories that I had at the previous moment, *as if* I were numerically the same person.

The oneness or identity of all created things, then, "depends on the arbitrary constitution of the Creator; who by his wise sovereign establishment so unites these successive new effects, that he *treats them as one*, by communicating to them like properties, relations, and circumstances; and so, leads us to regard and treat them as one." (OS 403) By 'arbitrary' Edwards does not mean whimsical or unplanned but simply that "which depends on nothing but the divine will; which divine will depends on nothing but the divine wisdom." (OS, 403)

Regarding the imputation question, Edwards thinks that just as the identity of created substances depends on divine establishment, so too God constitutes an identity or oneness between Adam and his posterity. As there is sufficient qualitative identity or similarity between the initial sprout and the grown tree and between the infant body and the forty year old body for God to treat them as one, there is also sufficient qualitative identity between Adam and his descendants for God to treat them as one (where 'one' means '*as if* they were numerically one').

And I am persuaded, no solid reason can be given, why God, who constitutes all other created union or oneness, according to his pleasure, and for what purposes, communications, and effects he pleases, may not establish a constitution whereby the natural

posterity of Adam, proceeding from him, much as the buds and branches from the stock or root of a tree, should be treated as one with him, for the derivation, either of righteousness and communion in rewards, or of the loss of righteousness and consequent corruption and guilt. (OS 405)

Thus, Paul's assertion in *Romans* 5 that "through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners" is intelligible because God treats "the one man" and "the many" who make up Adam's posterity as "one with him." He employs the metaphors of the root of a tree and its branches and the head and the other members of the body to illustrate the notion that God treats Adam and his posterity as a single entity.

Paul Helm's objections

In *Faith and Understanding*, Paul Helm states two major objections to Edwards' account of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. His first objection is that Edwards's doctrine of temporal *parts* leads to a "counterintuitive" view of personal identity.

We all naturally assume that we exist as numerically the same persons from day to day, despite many changes to our personalities and circumstances. It is hard to accept the Edwardsean view, therefore, that nothing is numerically identical with anything that existed a moment ago, but that everything, each moment, is created anew... To say that this view is counterintuitive does not mean to say that it is false; nor is it unusual for a philosophical view to be counterintuitive. But given that it is counterintuitive Edwards needs to have a particularly strong reason for affirming that it is true.¹¹

Helm's claim seems plausible. We all believe, quite instinctively, that as persons we are *numerically the same* from moment to moment, minute to minute, hour to hour. I also agree with Helm that counterintuitive beliefs are not necessarily false and that Edwards needs to have a very strong reason for denying the persistent sameness of created things. But Edwards argues that the past, even the immediate past, does not exist and, therefore, the past is not causally efficacious in regard to present existence. If time is successive, if the past is not the present, if the past has no real existence (except in memory), and if non-existence cannot give rise to existence, then it follows for Edwards that there are not and cannot be created

things that remain numerically the same from moment to moment.¹²

Edwards would readily concede that we *appear* to be numerically the same persons from moment to moment and that it is counterintuitive to think otherwise. But in fact our intuitions in this matter are not trustworthy. There is a qualitative identity (similarity) between my present and past existence, but no numerical sameness. As human beings we are subject to all sorts of illusions which we readily admit are illusions once we see that we have confused appearance with reality. There are a number of stock examples we could mention here, e.g., the stick in the water that *appears* bent but is *really* straight, objects at a distance that *appear* smaller than they *really* are, the movie screen that *appears* red (due to a red light that is cast upon it) but is *really* white.

Helm, however, has another objection.

Second, the view of personal identity we find expressed in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* appears to be at odds with other things Edwards claims elsewhere in his writings. For example in his most famous work, *The Freedom of the Will* (1754), Edwards maintains in no uncertain terms a version of causal determinism as applied to human actions. There he says that our actions are caused by our volitions, our desires. If the idea of causation being used here is a temporal notion, that is, if part of what it means to say that *X* causes *Y* is that *X* is an event that precedes *Y* in time, and brings *Y* to pass, then what Edwards is saying is that Smith's volition at *t1* brings about Smith's action at *t2*. But then this would appear to presuppose both the existence of Smith at these two times, and the real causal efficacy of Smith's desire; Smith's desire brings about his action at a later time. But as we have seen, in his work on original sin Edwards appears to be denying that either of these are possible.¹³

Helm is correct in claiming that Edwards subscribes to "a version of causal determinism as applied to human actions" and that Edwards' concept of causation is a temporal one. In *Freedom of the Will* Edwards does say that actions are caused by antecedent choices or volitions (which, in turn, are caused by antecedent motives). But Edwards does not say, as Helm thinks, that "Smith's volition at *t1* brings about Smith's action at *t2*" if by 'brings about' one means that Smith's

volition is causally efficacious. Volitions are causes for Edwards, but they are not efficient causes. In *Freedom of the Will* Edwards distinguishes between two senses of the term 'cause,' viz., (a) "that which has a positive efficiency or influence to produce a thing, or bring it to pass," and (b) that which has "the nature of a ground or reason why some things are, rather than others; or why they are as they are, rather than otherwise."¹⁴ It seems clear that every efficient cause is a "ground or reason" but not vice-versa.

Edwards thinks that volitions and desires are antecedent grounds or reasons, not positive productive influences. Helm's claim that Edwards' view presupposes that volitions and desires are causally efficacious misses the mark. Smith may desire or choose to raise his hand and then go ahead and raise his hand. His desire or choice is the *reason* that he raises his hand but it does not produce the action of raising his hand (i.e., it is not causally efficacious). As regards Helm's further claim that Smith's volition at *t1* bringing about Smith's action at *t2* presupposes the existence of Smith at these two times I think that Edwards would introduce the distinction between numerical identity and qualitative identity mentioned earlier and would claim that it is illusory to think that it is numerically the same Smith that exists at *t1* and *t2*. He would agree with Helm that it *appears* to be the same individual at these two times but, in *reality*, the Smith at *t2* is only *qualitatively identical* to the Smith who exists at *t1*.

In *The Providence of God*, Helm claims that Edwards' view is "preposterous" and should be rejected because "there is no place in it for horizontal causation."¹⁵ He thinks Edwards' doctrines of temporal parts and continual creation imply that all causation is *vertical* efficient causation (from God). A coherent and adequate doctrine of divine providence must make room for the so-called *horizontal* activity of *secondary causes*. I think Edwards would reply that there can be only one efficient cause of *existence*, viz., God. There are no secondary causes of *existence*. In this respect, Edwards is of one mind with traditional Christian theology. But, as we have noted, Edwards does have a doctrine of antecedent grounds or reasons (sometimes referred to as occasional causes) and they fulfill the role of secondary causes in his theological system. Desires and motives are prime examples of secondary causes. However, it is important to note that when

desires and motives cause (in the manner of antecedent grounds or reasons) they do not exist in or occupy the past. The past does not exist. Only a presently existing motive or desire can cause a human choice. When I choose to continue to write this paper, there is a reason for my choice but my reason is not in the past. It exists in the present. It may accompany the choice or exist prior to a choice not yet made. The fact that the reason is antecedent to the choice does not mean or imply that it is in the past. What we refer to as the past is simply the present as relived by memory. Helm's claim that "there is no place for horizontal causation" in Edwards' view, then, is ill founded.

Philip Quinn's objections

In his article, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action," Philip Quinn is also concerned with the personal identity issue. He claims that Edwards' position leads to certain "outrageous views." Quinn thinks that human actions which "involve bodily motion take time to perform."¹⁶ He concedes that activities not involving

agent: "a greedy nephew could murder his wealthy aunt by pouring poison in her tea yet he might die of a heart attack, and hence cease to be, before his aunt drinks the poison tea and dies."¹⁸ But while the greedy nephew is alive and well his act of pouring the tea requires that he performs this act at every moment during this temporal interval. Thus, Quinn concludes that "given that human agents are embodied and can perform actions only by making motions, then these are human actions only if human agents are persistent things."¹⁹ Edwards' doctrine of temporal parts does not allow for numerically identical persisting agents who perform bodily motions that take time to perform.

Second, Quinn claims that it also follows from Edwards' version of the doctrine of temporal parts that it is

a mistake to say that Adam ate the forbidden fruit, for he could have done that only if he were a persistent thing. Instead God has arbitrarily decided to treat a number of diverse instantaneous persons as one by endowing them with similar properties and relations and to create the illusion that some one person ate the forbidden fruit. But in sober truth no one of these diverse instantaneous persons ate the forbidden fruit, for no one of them existed long enough to do so.... Hence, no one actually ate the forbidden fruit, and the great Christian doctrine of original sin is not defended but dissolved.²⁰

Finally, there is the problem of ascribing blame to a human agent for past moral transgressions. We think it just to punish the later Charles Manson for the misdeeds of the earlier Charles Manson, so too God is just when "God punishes later Adams for the disobedience of earlier Adams."²¹ But how can this be if the earlier and later Mansons and the earlier and later Adams are "diverse instantaneous persons?" Quinn thinks that "if we actually held the Edwardsean theory, we should not think it obviously just to punish later Mansons for the deeds of earlier Mansons."²²

In response to Quinn's objections, Edwards would probably concede that there *is* such a thing as the "illusion of persistence." As mentioned earlier we experience an illusion when we believe we are numerically the same persons from moment to moment. We confuse *appearance* with *reality*, numerical identity with qualitative identity. It would seem that the real

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bodily motion can be instantaneous, taking no time to perform. God, for example, does not act through a body, and "mental willings or deciding, if there are any such things, might be examples of instantaneous mental acts."¹⁷

But the act of raising one's arm cannot be instantaneous. Quinn concedes that some human actions do not require a numerically identical persisting

issue here is whether qualitative identity between “diverse instantaneous persons” is sufficient to account for bodily motions such as raising one’s arm and for holding the later Manson morally accountable for the misdeeds of earlier Mansons. I think Edwards would say that if I perceive the greedy nephew as a persisting agent, then I am experiencing an illusion. If it takes five moments for the nephew to pour the tea, then, yes, the nephew at moment 1 is a “diverse instantaneous person” from the nephew at moment 2, and the nephew at moment 2 is a “diverse instantaneous person” from the nephew at moment 3, and so on. But Edwards thinks that God constitutes a numerical

“At each instant God creates again anew and weaves for us the illusion of persistence by endowing his creations with properties and relations similar to those possessed by the old.”

identity between these “diverse instantaneous persons.” He views them *as if* they were one. It is not necessary that I know or am aware that I am only qualitatively identical with my former selves. God enables each “diverse instantaneous person” to remember past acts which he believes to be *his own*, to believe himself to be honest, truthful, or generous (or dishonest, a liar, or a miser), in short, to view himself *as if* he were numerically one.

Edwards would also concede that a persisting agent does not pour the tea or raise his arm. Nor is a persisting agent accountable for past misdeeds. And he would agree with Quinn’s characterization that “for Edwards, contingent things which begin to exist by being created by God out of nothing cannot literally persist through time. They exist only instantaneously. At each instant God creates again anew and weaves for us the illusion of persistence by endowing his creations with properties and relations similar to those possessed by the old.”²³ Quinn seems bothered by “the illusion of persistence.”

Edwards is not. He believes it is entirely consistent with the doctrine of temporal parts and the claim that qualitative identity (upheld by divine establishment) is sufficient for personal identity.

Charles Hodge’s objections

In his *Systematic Theology*, in a section entitled “Objections to the Edwardian theory,” Charles Hodge raises five objections to the doctrine of continued creation which aim at undermining Edwards’ theory of the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity.

In his first objection, Hodge claims that “because every new effect which we produce is due to a new exercise of our efficiency, it is assumed that such must be the case with God.... It is surely just as conceivable or intelligible that God should will the continuous existence of things which He creates, as that He should create them anew at every successive moment.”²⁴ In the abstract Hodge is correct in claiming that it is “just as conceivable or intelligible” that God could create individuals with continuous existence as that he creates “them anew at every successive moment.” But I think Edwards would reply that God can create individuals with continuous existence *only if he creates them numerically the same from moment to moment*. God could have done this but he evidently chose not to since “all dependent existence whatsoever is in a constant flux, ever passing and returning; renewed every moment, as the colors of bodies are every moment renewed by the light that shines upon them; and all is constantly proceeding from God as light from the sun.” (OS 404) Every dependent thing must be “renewed every moment” by God. The past is not causally efficacious. This is why a created thing does not and cannot enjoy continuous uninterrupted existence.

Second, Hodge thinks that Edwards’ doctrine of continued creation fails to distinguish between divine creation and divine preservation.

This doctrine of a continued creation destroys the Scriptural and common sense distinction between creation and preservation.... By creation, God calls things into existence, and by preservation He upholds them in being. The two ideas are essentially distinct.²⁵

Hodge’s claim about the alleged confusion of creation and preservation assumes that by ‘preservation’

one means the divine upholding of a thing *that has continuous existence*. But Edwards doesn't think created things have continuous existence. Created temporal things have no unbreakable claim on existence and would "drop into nothing, upon the ceasing of the present moment, without a new exertion of the divine power to cause them to exist in the following moment." (OS 401-402) The "new exertion of the divine power" renews them in being. This is what Edwards means by the divine upholding. Divine creation refers to God's role as the *causa essendi*. Divine preservation or upholding refers to God's role as the continuous *causa essendi*. If there is a difference between the *causa essendi* and the *causa essendi* who *creates continuously*, then the traditional distinction between creation and preservation has been preserved.

Third, Hodge claims that Edwards' doctrine of continued creation has abandoned the idea of created substance.

The idea of substance is a primitive idea. It is given in the constitution of our nature. It is an intuitive truth, as is proved by its universality and necessity. One of the essential elements of that idea is uninterrupted continuity of being. Substance is that which stands; which remains unchanged under all the phenomenal mutations to which it is subjected. According to the theory of continued creation there is and can be no created substance. God is the only substance in the universe. Everything out of God is a series of new effects; there is nothing which has continuous existence, and therefore there is no substance.²⁶

Hodge's third objections seems to have two parts, viz., (a) Edwards does not see that "the idea of substance is a primitive idea," and (b) as a consequence Edwards rejects the existence of created substances. As to (a) Edwards would say that the idea of substance is not primitive if by 'primitive' Hodge means *given in experience*. Locke had described the idea of substance as the "supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities, we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substante*, without something to support them."²⁷ For Locke we have no direct and immediate experience or awareness of substance (either material or mental substance). We *infer* a substance because we cannot conceive qualities existing by themselves. Edwards goes further than Locke: there is no

substance or "I know not what" support of properties or qualities in the first place, no unknown substance that supports mental activities or bodily qualities.

Fourth, Hodge claims that several absurd consequences flow from the Edwardsean doctrine of God as the only substance.

It necessarily follows that if God is the only substance He is the only agent in the universe. . . . If He creates the soul every successive instant, He creates all its states, thoughts, feelings, and volitions. The soul is only a series of divine acts. And therefore there can be no free agency, no sin, no responsibility, no individual existence. The universe is only the self-manifestation of God. This doctrine, therefore, in its consequences, is essentially pantheistic.²⁸

There are inaccuracies, however, in Hodge's *reductio*. God, for Edwards, is an agent or efficient cause who acts "on" the universe but he is not an agent "in" the universe. In fairness to Hodge there have been some Edwards scholars who think that his metaphysics is essentially pantheistic in nature. But if a pantheist is someone who thinks God and the universe are one and the same, then there are simply too many claims Edwards makes to suggest the contrary. The creature/Creator distinction is characteristic not only his metaphysics but the hundreds of sermons he wrote and preached.

In addition, I think Edwards would also suggest that it is inaccurate to say that "the soul is only a series of divine acts." It is more accurate to say that the soul is a series of "effects of divine acts" insofar as God causes each presently existing state of consciousness. And when Hodge claims that, for Edwards, "there can be no free agency, no sin, no responsibility, no individual existence," I think he sees these consequences flowing from Edwards' rejection of numerically identical individual persons. However, as I have already noted, Edwards sees no difficulty ascribing freedom, sin, and responsibility to individuals who are only qualitatively identical but treated as numerically identical by God.

Hodge's fifth objection is similar to Quinn's third objection. It bears directly on the problem of imputing Adam's sin to his posterity. Hodge claims that, unless human persons are numerically the same from moment to moment, there can be no "real connection between the present and the past in the life of the

soul.”²⁹ There is no need to repeat the Edwardsean reply to Quinn’s objections, except to emphasize again that qualitatively identical individuals who are treated *as if* they were numerically identical by God are still guilty of past transgressions. Just as the present Manson is guilty of the past acts of earlier Mansons, so Adam’s posterity is guilty of Adam’s sin. If God views the present Manson *as if* he has “a real connection” (to use Hodge’s phrase) with his earlier selves, then there is a “real connection,” in God’s mind, “between the present and past in the life of the soul.”

Conclusion

The *realist* account of the imputation of Adam’s sin has a solid footing in Medieval theology as does the federal or representative view in Reformed theology. Hodge thinks that the realist theory purports to explain two facts, “first, the fact that we are punished for the sin of Adam; and, secondly, that hereditary depravity is in us truly and properly sin, involving guilt as well as pollution.”³⁰ The realist view accounts for the first fact “on the ground that Adam’s sin was our own act” and the second fact “on the ground that native depravity is the consequence of our own voluntary action.”³¹ Hodge, however, doesn’t think that the realist theory is able to explain either of these facts. For if sin is an “act of conscious self-determination,” then how can the first sin be *my* act and how can I possibly be guilty of an act that I was not conscious of since it happened thousands of years before I was born? How can generic humanity be individualized in Adam? The realist view errs, according to Hodge, by making “humanity numerically one and the same substance in Adam and in all the individuals of his race.”³²

As noted earlier, Hodge himself thinks “it was because Adam was the representative of his race, that his sin is the judicial ground of their condemnation.”

I would like to conclude this study by respectfully disagreeing with Hodge. In all of his examples there seems to be a tacit distinction between the representative and the persons being represented. I believe the most Hodge can argue for is that Adam’s posterity is, in some sense, *liable* for his sin, just as the son may be *liable* for the sin of his father. If my father is a felon who embezzles funds from a bank, or a drunkard who drives while intoxicated and causes the death of another motorist, then I may feel *liable*, and thus *assume*

responsibility for his misdeeds. But I cannot *be* responsible for his breaking the law simply because his actions are not *my* actions. An *identity* must exist between Adam and his posterity for the latter to be guilty and exposed to punishment. Only if God views and treats Adam and his posterity as *one* moral person, *one* single entity, can guilt and exposedness to punishment be imputed to Adam’s descendants. In short, if Adam is the appointed *representative* of his race and there is a distinction between the *representative* and the *persons being represented*, then it seems legitimate to ask why I should be guilty of a sin that I myself did not commit.

As previously noted the Rev. John Taylor believed that it was unjust and unreasonable for Adam’s posterity to bear the guilt of Adam’s sin if Adam and his posterity are entirely distinct agents. (OS 394) I think Edwards agreed with Taylor on this point and that is why he thought that Adam and his posterity must be viewed as a single moral entity and not as distinct agents. (OS 391) The federal or representative view seems to presuppose a distinction between Adam and his posterity. Edwards believes there is no such distinction. I think this is why he does not defend the federal view in *Original Sin*.

Edwards’ own view on the imputation issue has not been well received. It rests on at least seven very controversial propositions: (i) created things exist for only a moment, (ii) the way present created things *appear* is not the way they *really* are, (iii) the past does not exist and is not causally efficacious, (iv) God is continually creating and recreating individuals from moment to moment, (v) there is no such thing as numerical sameness in the created order, (vi) qualitative identity is sufficient for God to treat individuals *as if* they were numerically the same and responsible for past transgressions, and (vii) there is sufficient similarity between Adam and his posterity such that God, *in fact*, treats them as one and the same. I am inclined to believe that propositions (i)-(vi) are true. I do not think there is a philosophical way of determining whether (vii) is true. But I believe Edwards’ view does provide a way of coherently and adequately dealing with the Romans 5: 12-19 passage. It escapes difficulties encountered in the realist and federal views and represents a more plausible way of understanding what Paul means when he says that “sin entered the world through one man.”

Notes

¹ Biblical references are to the New International Version.

² William Wainwright, "Original Sin," in *Philosophy and The Christian Faith*, ed. by Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 42.

³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴ *Original Sin (OS)*, ed. by Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 394.

⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia2ae, Q. 81, art. 1, vol. 26 of the Blackfriars edition (tr. by T.C. O'Brien, O.P.), 9.

⁶ Paul Helm, *Faith and Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 160.

⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, Part II, Ch. VIII (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted, 1975), 198.

⁸ Helm, *Faith and Understanding*, 161.

⁹ Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1976), 138.

¹⁰ *The "Miscellanies,"* ed. by Thomas Schafer, Volume 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 373.

¹¹ Helm, *Faith and Understanding*, 174.

¹² Edwards' claim about the causal inefficacy of past events stands in marked contrast to the view presented by Whitehead in *Process and Reality*. For Whitehead present *actual entities* or *occasions* are immediately dependent on causally efficacious past occasions (which make up the 'actual world') such that there is a "flow of feeling" between the present and the immediate past. The past has a reality for Whitehead; it has no reality (except in the memory) for Edwards. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1969).

¹³ Helm, *Faith and Understanding*, 174-175.

¹⁴ *Freedom of the Will*, ed. by Paul Ramsey, Volume I of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 180-181.

¹⁵ Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 86.

¹⁶ Philip Quinn, "Divine Conservation, Continuous Creation, and Human Action," in *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 219.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book Two, Ch. XXIII.

²⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 220.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 221.



Ordination, the Bible, and Pastoral Care

By Theresa Latini

At the 2001 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), elders and ministers representing presbyteries throughout the country presented an in-depth analysis supporting the ordination of practicing, self-avowed homosexuals. Below is a *brief* response to *some* of the theological tenets of their presentation. I hope that this response will assist not only voting ministers and elders but also those who question whether or not the PC(USA) should eliminate the explicit requirement that ordained leaders live a life of chastity in singleness or fidelity in a covenant of marriage between a woman and a man.

Argument One

The current position of the PCUSA, as stipulated in its Book of Order (G6.0106b), hinders the denomination from providing effective pastoral care.

The basic argument here is that failure to ordain homosexuals judges and condemns—i.e. “ghettoizes”—certain Christians. Modeling itself upon the example of Jesus Christ, the church is called to be hospitable and inclusive of all God’s children, yet the stipulations of the *Book of Order* are inhospitable and offensive, particularly to the un-churched.

Response

First, this argument confuses the categories of pastoral care and ordination. Clearly, our constitution calls the church and her ordained officers to provide pastoral care to all people, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, age or any other defining factor. The directory of worship provides a beautiful description of pastoral care—e.g. in illness, at death, in loss, in broken relationships, in sin & forgiveness, and in life transitions. To neglect adequate pastoral care because of an individual’s sexual orientation indeed would represent a gross failure to follow Jesus’ model

of hospitality and special care for the marginalized, poor, and needy. Jesus Christ, as presented in the Gospels, consistently befriended and taught those viewed as “unacceptable” in his culture. Our ministry should be no different. However, Jesus’ ministry to the outcast went beyond an embrace or invitation into the kingdom of God. He challenged the marginalized—as he did the wealthy, the privileged, and the religious leaders—to a life marked by repentance, self-denial, and obedient surrender to the will and ways of God.

Second, the argument suggests that our constitution hinders pastoral care to homosexuals because it does not sanction homosexual relationships, thereby deeply offending such individuals and most likely driving them away from the PC(USA). But can our theology be determined by our desire not to offend? Clearly the church should not seek to offend anyone but rather to speak the truth in love and in a manner that effectively communicates the Gospel to those outside the Church (as the Apostle Paul spoke on Mars Hill). But the message of the Gospel does offend. When Jesus preached “take up your cross and follow me,” many disciples left Jesus. He proclaimed, “I have not come to bring peace but a sword,” in reference to the fact that families would be divided by the choice of some to follow him. Ultimately Jesus’ message was so offensive to some that they murdered him.

Third, if homosexuality is not God’s intent for human relating, then changing our ordination standards so as to affirm homosexual relationships is not compassionate and may, in fact, undermine the freedom of the Gospel. God’s love involves standards for

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human life in community, standards meant to facilitate human flourishing. One of these standards is the limitation of sexual intercourse to heterosexual marriage. Encouraging individuals to live outside this standard is an act that contradicts God's best intentions for humanity. Similarly, the true freedom of the Gospel is the freedom, granted by the Holy Spirit, to obey God and live in accordance to God's prescription for human relationships.

Argument Two

The Scriptural passages which are cited as condemnation of homosexual behavior are ambiguous in meaning.

The basic argument here is that Biblical scholars disagree about the correct interpretation and application of such passages as Gen. 19:4-9, Lev. 18:22, 20:13, Rom. 1:26-27, I Cor. 6:9-10, and I Tim. 1:9-10. Failure to ordain practicing homosexuals cannot be founded upon ambiguity and a limited set of verses scattered throughout the Bible. Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. Further, the ancient context of homosexual behavior is significantly different than our current understanding of homosexual orientation and practice which can result in loving, monogamous same-sex relationships, thus rendering these verses inapplicable to our debate.

Response

Numerous contemporary scholars have presented an in-depth exegetical study of these six passages which maintains continuity with the traditional position that homosexual behavior is outside the bounds of God-ordained human activity. In particular, I would refer readers to *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* by Robert A.J. Gagnon. Rather than consider each of these passages separately, I would like to place the issue of the ordination of practicing homosexuals in the larger context of Scripture and a Reformed theology of marriage.

Support for the ordination of practicing homosexuals is, by and large, founded upon the belief that homosexuality is God's created intent for a particular group of individuals. But Scripture as a whole, as interpreted throughout 2000 years of Church history, affirms that sexual intercourse is to be enjoyed solely within a covenant of marriage

between a man and a woman. Whether interpreted literally or metaphorically, the creation narrative in Genesis 2-3 depicts God's provision for human intimacy within the differentiation of male and female. The result of gender differentiation was the institution of marriage, which Jesus affirmed in his teaching (Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-9). All forms of sexual behavior outside a covenant of marriage between a woman and a man contradict the divine intent for human sexual expression.

Further, while according to the Gospel accounts Jesus did not address the topic of homosexuality, neither did he address a plethora of contemporary problems—domestic violence, incest, alcohol abuse, etc. Jesus taught in a particular context, a Jewish context

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in which homosexual behavior clearly was condemned as a form of disobedience to God's law. Given Jesus' many challenges to the religious teaching of his day, one could argue more readily that Jesus' silence represents his concurrence with the common prohibition on homosexual behavior rather than his blessing of it.

Finally, it is important to note that our Confessions and classic Reformed theologians (most notably John Calvin and Karl Barth) present a particular understanding of human sexuality and marriage: (1) Marriage is a divine institution blessed by Jesus Christ; (2) Marriage is to be marked by mutuality, respect, loving companionship, and a balance of togetherness and differentiation; (3) Marriage is a physical

and spiritual union which reflects the covenant relationship between God and humanity; (4) Marriage is intended by God to be lifelong; (5) Marriage provides the environment for procreation and raising of children; (6) Marriage is a self-giving task, in which husband and wife are responsible to one another and the larger community.

There is in Scripture no support for the idea that homosexual relationships are divinely ordered or able to reflect God's election of and covenant relationship with humanity. The Confession of 1967 captures this when it states that the husband-wife relationship "exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created [hu]mankind"

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(9.47). Finally, homosexual relationships do not seem to measure up to Barth's discussion of differentiation in marriage. To each other, each is the OTHER in terms of a host of personal characteristics, but anatomically homosexual couples are the same and procreation is not even a possibility.

Argument Three

The Church has changed its position on slavery and women's ordination. Now that we know more about homosexuality, we must change our position on gay ordination.

This argument is premised on the Presbyterian affirmation that confessional statements and church practice are subordinate to the authority of Jesus Christ. Human sin, in this instance prejudice, may

blind us from apprehending the truth of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture, thus the church remains open to the reform of its standards. In short, "Ecclesia reformata, semper Reformanda," "The Church Reformed, always reforming" according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit (*Book of Order* G2.0200).

Response

In the past, PC(USA) policy and practice supported slavery and prohibited women's ordination. These policies were overturned in recognition of the fact that they denied a basic tenet of the doctrine of creation—that God has created both male and female in a variety of ethnic groups, and in their gender and race, they reflect the image of God. In these two instances, it may be said that the PC(USA) reformed its faith according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit, or perhaps more accurately, its faith *was reformed* by the Word and Spirit of God.

The second half of that phrase, "according to the Word of God and the call of Spirit," is crucial for understanding the foundation for the reform of church policy on these matters.

Take, for example, the issue of women's ordination. While the impetus for allowing women's ordination may have originated in the cultural milieu of feminism, the witness of Scripture played an important role in this reform of our ordination standards. That is, Scripture provides the foundation for the equal treatment of women—i.e. women, like men, are created in the image of God and the subjection of women is a result of human sinfulness not a divine proscription for human behavior (Genesis 2-3). The radically just treatment of women by Jesus confirms this.

Secondly, many Scriptural texts take for granted, and implicitly affirm, the religious leadership of women—e.g. Deborah, Huldah, Miriam in the Old Testament, and Anna, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junias in the New Testament. These women functioned as church leaders, teachers, deacons, prophets, and apostles. Thus Paul's prohibition of women's leadership, most notably in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, seems to be an anomaly and a function of particular situation in Ephesus (as has been argued by numerous biblical scholars). In other words, the reform of church policy so as to allow for women's ordination is in fact grounded in the witness of Scripture. (A similar argument can be

made for the change of church policy regarding slavery and civil rights for all ethnic groups.) We rightly conclude therefore that previously Church leaders filtered Scripture through their lens of patriarchy and racism.

The question is "Have we done the same in our interpretation of Scripture's prohibition of homosexuality? Have we misapplied the Bible in stating that homosexual relationships contradict God's intention for human sexual relating? Have we been blinded by homophobia/heterosexism?" First, it must be acknowledged that discrimination of homosexuals has been an unfortunate part of church history, up to and including the present. It does not necessarily follow that this reality has veiled our understanding of God's intent for human sexual expression. That is, unlike the question of female church leadership, there is no affirmation of homosexual behavior anywhere in Scripture. Second, being a woman or person of color is a function of divine created intent. Gender and race are part of God's differentiation of humanity in creation. Gender and race are immutable and genetic. In contrast, homosexuals are not a distinct category of creation. Further, there is no scientific evidence that homosexuality is genetic or immutable. In fact, some scientific studies attest to the possibility of changing sexual orientation.

Concluding Comments

If we conclude that Scripture, our confessions, classic Reformed theology, and a clear understanding of our directives for pastoral care compel us to maintain the current standards of ordination, as delineated in the *Book of Order*, then simultaneously we must admit that these same resources compel us to humility, graciousness, and compassion in our response to those advocating the ordination of practicing homosexuals, including, and perhaps most importantly, those homosexuals themselves. Where the debate has been characterized by godless, inaccurate stereotypes of homosexual persons, we must acknowledge that our church and society includes many caring, talented, and intelligent gays and lesbians who have been treated with disdain by others in the name of Christ. While homosexuality may not be an aspect God's differentiation of humanity in creation, homosexually oriented people (and that includes those who practice

their orientation) have been created in God's image and must be treated with the dignity due all children of God. Where the debate has maligned others as disregarding the authority of Scripture, let us understand that most church leaders who advocate change in the *Book of Order* do not despise Scripture but are responding, at least in part, to the pain experienced by many sisters and brothers in Christ. Honesty compels us to acknowledge that homosexual relationships can be marked by more self-giving love than many heterosexual relationships, and equal treatment of all compels us to call heterosexuals to a life of fidelity to Jesus Christ and one another.

Let us remember that the redemptive, transforming love of Jesus Christ and the freedom of the Gospel, which is the freedom to obey, applies to all of us in every area of our lives. If we advocate for maintaining an explicit requirement that ordained leaders of the PC(USA) live either in chastity in singleness or fidelity in a heterosexual covenant of marriage, let us do so out of a desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ and one another.



Information, Algorithms and the Unknowable Nature of Life's Origin

by Dean L. Overman and Hubert P. Yockey

If you have an analog television set, like the ones in use from the dawn of television, the electrical voltages vary continuously. If you purchase a digital television set, your reception will improve enormously because the signals are coded so that noise can be removed from your television screen. The signals that enter a digital television set are a stream of zeros and ones like the coding in a computer. This new technology produces a much better picture and will dominate the television industry just as color television replaced the old black and white pictures.

All signals are afflicted with noise. It is impossible to remove the effect of noise in analog signals. Early records of the glorious voice of Enrico Caruso do not compare with the modern digital recordings of the Three Tenors: Plácido Domingo, José Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti. It is straightforward to eliminate as much of the effect of noise as we wish if the signal is digitized. In spite of the small power available, spacecrafts send clear pictures of the planets by digitizing the signal much the same way as that of digital television.

A New Paradigm of Biological Information

What is more astonishing is that the development from your mother's fertilized egg is also governed by your digital genome. It is so for all life and has been for at least 3.85 billion years since life appeared on Earth.¹

The digital character of life is a gulf between living organisms and inanimate matter. There is no trace of

messages determining the results of chemical reactions in inanimate matter. How did this strange gulf between the humblest creatures and inanimate matter arise? Can science shed some light on how that strange gulf was crossed? How did the scheme of genetic information recorded in DNA and transferred to form protein through mRNA arise in nature?

Each cell in your body has a nucleus containing twenty-three chromosomes (color bodies), one from each parent. These chromosomes are comprised of long chains of deoxyribonucleic acid or DNA which is a molecule shaped in a double helix resembling a ladder. The "rungs" of the ladder are called "bases." There are four nucleotide bases: A for adenine, T for thymine, G for guanine and C for cytosine. Because of their shapes, in order to fit together into the rungs, G is always paired with C, and A is always paired with T. The sequences in which the pairs are arranged determine the information or instructions required to make proteins. Proteins perform all of the essential biological functions in your body and determine basic physical features.

Hubert P. Yockey is possibly the world's leading expert on Information Theory and the origin of life. He received his doctorate in physics under J. Robert Oppenheimer at Berkeley, and was a leading pioneer in applying Information Theory to the genetic code. His book, Information Theory and Molecular Biology is the leading text in the field.

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Information is one of the key words which define our culture. "Information technology," "bioinformatics," "information highway," and "information explosion" are among the terms constantly permeating much of our newspapers, media, and daily communications. But what is information? When we study information, we find it is not matter or energy. For years matter and energy were considered to be the two fundamentals in our universe. Einstein discovered matter and energy were actually one fundamental: matter/energy. With the discovery of the workings of the DNA molecule, we now know there are still two fundamentals: matter/energy and information.

What is the source of biological information? This question is central to the search for the origin of life because biological information is the central distinc-

tion between living and nonliving matter. is already in the sodium and chlorine. When nitrogen, carbon, and hydrogen combine with an energy input, amino acids (the building blocks of protein) may result, but not molecules rich in information; the "knowledge" of how to make information-rich molecules is not contained in the nitrogen, carbon and hydrogen.²

Something else is going on which traditional views of nature and nature's laws cannot explain. The laws of chemistry and physics, as we shall demonstrate, cannot be the source of meaningful biological information. Nevertheless, once upon a time, meaningful biological information did not exist. From the fossil records we know that it appeared at least 3.85 billion years ago. Where did it come from?

The study of information results in a new view of nature. As noted above, information is not matter or energy. Gregory Chaitin, perhaps the leading mathematician in the field of information theory, questions the traditional paradigm that matter is primary and that information is somehow derived from matter or energy. He asks, "What if information is primary, and matter/energy is a secondary phenomenon?" Chaitin notes that identical information can be conveyed without regard to the particular kind of matter employed. Thus, the same information in DNA can be carried in RNA; the same information on a videotape can be conveyed on a DVD; the same information carried in long-term memory can be carried in short-term memory; the same information in nerve impulses can be carried by hormones. The particular kind of matter doesn't, well, doesn't matter. What is important is the information. In his words, "the same software can run on many machines."³

Because the life message is *linear, particulate* and *digital*, we can bring to bear on genetics all the ideas that have been used to develop computer technology and the recording, coding, decoding and transmission of messages. Life messages, like all messages that are conveyed by an abstract, symbolic language in sequences taken from a finite alphabet of symbols, have what is known as *information content*. The information content of the life message can be measured in terms familiar to any user of computers. The unit of measurement is called the bit, a contraction of *binary digit*. (In this day of computers the terms, bit and byte are surely familiar to the reader.)

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Presently, no one has any plausible idea concerning the source of biological information. Most proposed scenarios focus on chance, the laws of physics and chemistry or a combination of these factors. But, as we shall see, these candidates are lacking in their ability. Meaningful information such as the kind existing in biological molecules does not exist inside the atoms of nonliving matter and cannot be explained by chemical bonding affinities.

For example, sodium and chlorine can combine to make salt. The "knowledge" for sodium chloride

Information content is a quantity characteristic of all messages and measures the amount of information conveyed by a sequence of letters selected from a finite alphabet without regard to its meaning. This quantity is nonmaterial and independent of the way in which it is recorded, but it must be registered by means of matter or energy, such as the sequences of nucleotides in DNA, sequences of amino acids in protein, electrical signals from a spacecraft, sequences of magnetized spots on the hard drive on which this article is written, or any other sequence in a finite alphabet. Some readers may remember the old IBM cards that operated by holes punched to indicate the code to the computer. It is our ability to measure information content that will allow us to determine that the information content in the laws of physics is large enough to form a snowflake, an oil drop or a solar system—but not large enough to form a virus or even a small enzyme, such as cytochrome c. The genome must contain more information than there is in the laws of physics and chemistry.

The Beginning of Information Theory

The possibility of a new paradigm of information first can be traced to Claude Shannon's publication of two papers in July and October of 1948 in the *Bell System Technical Journal*. In these papers Shannon, an electrical engineer, developed a mathematical theory of information with the perspective of information as an active agent which, through the use of codes, conveys messages in the form of instructions or signals, such as the signal from a television transmitter to an antennae or receiver on a television set.

Shannon set forth theorems addressing the issue of sending messages from one location to another in an economic, expeditious and efficient manner. As an employee of Bell Laboratories, he was mainly concerned with the efficacy and lucidity of telephone and radio transmissions. More importantly, for our purposes, Shannon developed a set of theorems applicable to all kinds of information in all circumstances. His theorems apply to any process whereby a message is transmitted from one place to another. The laws of information contained in these theorems are universal.

Dr. Claude E. Shannon solved a problem in radio and telephone communications by a mathematical

theorem which established entropy as a measure of randomness or the amount of choice one has in writing a message. In information theory⁴ (originally called communication theory), randomness increases as the number of messages among which the source may select increases. Randomness also increases as the uncertainty to the recipient of the message increases and decreases as the uncertainty is more limited. In other words, randomness is a measure of the unpredictability present in a communication system. The reason information content is measured by randomness is that by selecting one message in a category of all allowed messages, one removes some of the uncertainty (randomness or entropy) present in that category. A message has high information content when selected from a large category of allowed messages. An increase in the number of allowed messages in a communication system, increases the randomness of the category and also increases the information content in the category. Accordingly, the higher the level of randomness in a communication system, the higher the level of information content in that communication system.

David Ruelle describes this fundamental concept in information theory as follows:

"The definition of information was modeled after that of entropy, the latter measuring the amount of randomness present in a system. Why should information be measured by randomness? Simply, because by choosing one message in a class of possible messages you dispel the randomness present in that class....The source of information is supposed to produce a random sequence of allowed messages (or an infinitely long message with certain statistical properties). It is not required that the messages be useful or logically coherent, or that they have any meaning at all. Saying that a message has high information content is the same as saying that it is extracted from a large class of allowed messages, or that it is very random."⁵

Shannon selected the "bit" as his unit of information. As noted above, a bit is a measure of the amount of information content, similar to a meter as a measure of length. Shannon realized if one could pin down the notion of uncertainty, one could measure precisely the amount of information conveyed by a message. In his 1948 papers, Shannon demonstrated that in any

communication system, a message coded in a string of binary digits can be sent along a communication channel without errors in the system—even in the presence of noise (disorder, such as static in a radio transmission), provided the message is coded with sufficient redundancy. The coding can be structured to be accurate in the communication of the message if the capacity of the communications channel is not overloaded.

This principle applies not only to communication systems produced by engineers, but also to the communication system of living organisms. The crucial element in insuring accuracy in the midst of noise and disorder is the addition of an effective form of redundancy so errors can be traced to individual digits by methods of cross checking. If a message is encoded into binary digits of 1's and 0's, the amount of errors

reproduction processes. Basically, all living matter uses the genetic code which more closely resembles Shannon's binary code than the Roman alphabet of the English language. This fact allows us to apply the principles of information theory and measure the amount of information content in living matter.

The amount of information content is a synonym for complexity. The applicable definition of complexity for our purposes is the measured level of information content or instructions required to maintain and replicate a living system. Because the level of information content is related to the level of randomness in a system, complexity and randomness are closely correlated.

The central distinction between living matter and nonliving matter is sufficient information content encoded in the living matter which allows it to replicate and maintain itself. Living matter requires a high level of information content in its communication system. To clarify the difficulty in looking to a law of physics or chemistry as the source of living matter, we turn to a discussion of the concept of the algorithm as it applies to information theory.

Algorithms and Information Theory

An algorithm is a finite procedure, written in symbols, by which a desired result can be achieved in computable operations. It is a compact formula for solving a problem with a finite series of steps. In the creation of software for a computer, an algorithm is the expression on paper of the proposed computational process. Rational fractions can be described by an infinite sequence of decimal digits. The computer program for calculating these sequences is a very short algorithm.

For example, if we divide 17 by 39, we produce the repeating, infinite sequence: .435897435897435897.... This sequence has an orderly pattern from which the rest of the sequence can be predicted. This orderliness allows us to write an algorithm of a short length that will produce the infinite sequence. Such an algorithm may be expressed, "Write 0.435897, and repeat indefinitely." This algorithm is a finite sequence which contains all of the information in the infinite sequence.⁷

In algorithmic information theory, as developed by Gregory Chaitin, entropy measures the randomness in a sequence by the length (in bits) of the shortest

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in the message can be controlled by adding an additional digit to the end of each string, as a cross check of the accuracy of the string.

For example, a "1" added to a string could be used to signify that all the digits in the message added together would equal an odd number. Similarly, a "0" could be added to the string to signify that all the digits in the message added together would equal an even number.⁶

The astonishing fact is that the genetic message is recorded in DNA, transcribed to mRNA, and read off to form the protein sequences of the critical enzymes of life. Thus, the genetic logic system is digitized as are communication systems and computers designed by electrical engineers.

The genetical information system has an effective redundancy to protect the living organism and its

algorithm which will generate the sequence. In the example of the division of 17 by 39 given above, the length of the algorithm would obviously be much shorter than the length of the infinite sequence. The measure of the amount of randomness in the infinite sequence depends upon the length of the shortest algorithm which will produce the sequence. Similarly, the randomness of a long finite sequence which may be generated by a much shorter algorithm is measured by the shorter length of the algorithm.

When a very long sequence may be expressed by a much shorter sequence in an algorithm, the sequence is an orderly sequence and not a random sequence. The shorter the sequence of the algorithm which generates a longer sequence, the more orderly or patterned the longer sequence. In other words, an orderly, patterned sequence is a sequence which can be generated by a short algorithm.

Chaitin defines the complexity of a sequence as the entropy which measures the randomness of the shortest algorithm needed to generate the sequence. Complexity is a scale with orderliness at one end and randomness at the other. When we speak of the amount of complexity in a sequence, we are speaking about the amount of its randomness.

Information Content is a Measure of Complexity

<i>Less Complexity</i>	<i>More Complexity</i>
1. Certainty	1. Uncertainty
2. Orderliness	2. Randomness
3. Low Communication Entropy	3. High Communication Entropy
4. Low Number of Allowed Messages or Sequences	4. High Number of Allowed Messages or Sequences
5. Small Information Content	5. High Information Content

Imagine a "source of information" producing the following sequence:

101101101101101101101101101101101101101101

This string of numbers is a binary sequence with a simple repeating pattern. Because it can be constructed by a simple algorithm or formula, it has a very low information content. The entire information content in this sequence could be given by the

simple instruction, "Write 101 fifteen times." The information of a periodic, patterned sequence can be compressed into a compact formula or algorithm. The regular pattern of the sequence allows the long string of ones and zeros to be compacted into a simple basic command. If the string of zeroes and ones was random with no pattern at all, we would not be able to find a shortened description of it. No compact equation could generate this string as the product of a simple process of computation.

A random sequence is a sequence that cannot be algorithmically compacted. As Chaitin has concluded, the random sequence's shortest description is the entire random sequence. Almost all long sequences have an entropy which is basically equal to that of a random sequence.⁸

The development of a human being is guided by just 750 megabytes of digital information.⁹ This information could be stored on a single CD-ROM in the biologist's personal computer. The genome in principle contains all the information necessary to bridge the gap between genotype and phenotype. All information necessary to determine the three-dimensional structure of proteins lies in the form of amino acid sequences, yet we remain unable to predict their structures.¹⁰ However, if one looks at Shannon's theorems, one will see that the information requirements of living matter are too high to be generated by chance. Our fundamental point is *all the scenarios in play to-day for the origin of life have a step that calls for a miracle which is unacceptable for a scientific theory.*

The genetic communication system is digital and has the same form as all communication systems. There is no trace of digital systems in nonliving matter, nor is there any trace of a code between alphabets in which messages are recorded. For this reason, information theory and coding theory and their tools of measuring information hold the key to the crucial questions on the origin of life. Any scenario for the origin of life must answer the ultimate question whether it can show how to generate sufficient information content for a genetic message in a molecule characteristic of life and needed for the assimilation of carbon dioxide and nitrogen by the protobiont.

According to mechanists–reductionists, nonliving matter can self–organize, and so life and evolution are manifestations of the spontaneous emergence of

“order.” However, the ideas of “complexity” and “order” are contradictory and mutually exclusive. Computer users are familiar with the rather large memory requirements, measured in bytes, of complicated programs and the capacities of their hard drives. The same applies to programs that purport to generate the genome of the protobiont.

Computer software is now sold in a compressed form. The result, achieved after the compression, is nearly indistinguishable from a random sequence since most of the patterns and regularities have been

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removed. A sequence is “highly ordered” only if it has regularities *and can be described by a much shorter sequence*. Some sequences of symbols exhibiting no orderly pattern from which the rest of the sequence can be predicted may, nevertheless, have low complexity because they can be computed from an algorithm of finite information content.

For example, π , the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter and e the base of natural logarithms have been calculated to sequences of more than a billion digits. These two numbers exhibit no orderly pattern —yet each digit in turn is uniquely computable. Both these numbers are irrational and that means they cannot be expressed as a ratio of two numbers no matter how large. They are also transcendental, meaning they are not the solution to any polynomial equation with integer coefficients no matter how long. A computer program exists that carries all the information contained in these infinite sequences even though there is no discernible pattern.

A sequence of symbols is highly “complex” when it has little or no redundancy or “order” and cannot be

described by a much shorter sequence or calculated by an algorithm of finite length. A random sequence has the highest degree of complexity, has no redundancy and cannot be described except by the sequence itself. Thus π and e , although their digits have no orderly pattern, are neither complex nor random. One of the reasons that “ordered” sequences, in DNA or protein for example, have nothing to do with the origin of life is there are so very few of them.

The Low Information Content in the Laws of Physics and Chemistry

Because randomness is required for a sequence to encode a sufficient amount of information to direct the biological functions of even the smallest living organism, the physical laws are not good candidates for the source of life’s origin. By definition, a law of nature is a relatively short algorithm. These laws are simple, compressed formulas with low information content. A physical law is a method of compacting data into a simple algorithm. Because the laws of physics and chemistry can be so compacted, they do not have sufficient information content to generate an information-rich sequence.

Life requires much more information than contained in these laws. The genetic information contained in even the smallest living organism is much larger than the information content found in the laws of physics and chemistry. (Chaitin has programmed the laws of physics and determined that their information content is very small.) This fact takes on further significance when one understands that information can only flow from sequences with a larger alphabet to those with a smaller alphabet. Those who look to the laws of chemistry and physics to explain the origin of life and the genetic code are looking through the wrong end of the telescope.

The Unknowable

One must be careful in drawing broad metaphysical inferences from the conclusion that we have reached. Perhaps the most that can be said is that the origin of life may be unknowable in principle. Our knowledge has limits. The ancient Greek mathematicians virtually completed plane and solid geometry. But there are three classical problems they could not solve with a straight edge and a compass: (1) the trisection of a given acute angle, (2) the doubling of the

cube, and (3) the construction of a square of area equal to that of a given circle.

It is easy to bisect any given angle. At first sight it appears that there must also be a way to trisect a given angle because, after all, it is simple to construct one a third in size. But that is an act of measurement subject to error, not one of pure reason. Some things are unknowable in principle, as shown by these classical problems.

Gregory Chaitin has shown that randomness is as fundamental in pure mathematics as it is in the tossing of dice. Mathematicians who thought that all mathematical statements could be either proven or disproved, were astonished by the "incompleteness" theorem of Kurt Gödel. Gödel's theorem demonstrates that for any axiom system which is consistent and can be expressed in a computer program there are statements that can be neither proved nor disproved. These statements are "undecidable" to mathematicians.

Bohr argued that life is consistent with, but "undecidable" by, human reasoning from physics and chemistry. His view was that the existence of life must be considered as an "elementary" fact (or axiom) that cannot be explained, but must be taken as a starting point in biology. The existence of a genome and the genetic code divides living organisms from nonliving matter. There is nothing in the physico-chemical world that remotely resembles reactions being determined by a sequence and codes between sequences. There is no requirement that the laws of the universe be plausible or even known to mankind.

Although some are optimistic that life may be made in the laboratory, it may well be that scientists will come closer and closer to the riddle of how life emerged on Earth. But because of the limitations of human reasoning, like Zeno's arrow, they will never achieve a complete solution.

Notes

¹ S. Mojzsis, J. Kishnamurthy, and G. Arrhenius, "Before RNA and After: Geological and Geochemical Constraints on Molecular Evolution," pp. 1–47, *The RNA World: The Nature of Modern RNA Suggests a Prebiotic RNA*, (Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 2nd edition, 1998) Raymond T. Gesteland, editor.

² Holmes Rolston, III, *Genes, Genesis and God* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p. 356.

³ Gregory J. Chaitin, *The Unknowable* (New York: Springer–Verlag Singapore Pte. Ltd, 1999) p.106.

⁴ Information theory's fundamental theory states that "it is impossible to transmit information through a noisy channel at any rate less than channel capacity with an arbitrarily small probability of error." Robert Ash, *Information Theory* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1965) p. 1.

⁵ David Ruelle, *Chance and Chaos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 132–133.

⁶ Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man* 75–78 (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1982).

⁷ Hubert P. Yockey, *Information Theory and Molecular Biology*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁹ M. V. Olson, "A Time to Sequence," *Science* 270 pp.374–396 (1995)

¹⁰ M. A. Huymen and P. Bork, "Measuring Genome Evolution," *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci. USA* 95, pp. 5549–5856 (1998).



Sermon

Following Christ in a Hostile World

by Aaron Messner

Text: Matthew 10:32-39

As we encounter our text this morning, we find Jesus teaching his disciples. On this occasion, he is about to send his disciples on a mission to go to the houses of Israel and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom that Jesus himself is bringing about. So, what we have here in chapter 10 is something like Jesus' pre-game pep talk. These are his last words to the disciples before they go out to minister and preach in his name.

Jesus' words to his disciples center around two themes. First, he is laying out what they can expect to encounter, and second, he is telling them what he expects and requires from them as his disciples.

These are important words, because they not only apply to this rag-tag band of first century men, but also apply to us as citizens of the 21st century. They are words of challenge and encouragement for all those who would call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. As we look at the specific words of Christ found in verses 32-39, I see three significant requirements Christ lays on his disciples: that we make public confession of him (32-33); that we give absolute and uncontested love and lordship to him (34-37); and that we follow him with sacrificial obedience (38-39).

The first requirement is that we acknowledge or confess Christ before others. This raises the question,

"What does such an acknowledgment entail?" Our text for this morning gives little help in answering this question. It informs us as to the location of such a confession—the public realm, but the content of such a confession is not developed here. However, there are many other places in Scripture where Jesus makes it very clear what he requires in a confession of him.

Matthew 16:13-23 is just such a text. There Jesus asks his disciples, "who do you say that I am?" What is at issue here is the person of Jesus—just who exactly is he? Peter's answer is, "Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." This is a rich and full statement. For such a statement of belief taps into a number of Old Testament messianic prophecies and expectations. To say that Jesus is the Christ is to acknowledge him as the King in the line of David, the great prophet in the line of Moses, and of Immanuel, "God with us".

Perhaps the best way to encapsulate all these references (and many other Biblical references to Jesus' person) is simply to confess: Jesus is Lord. That was the confession of Thomas when he declared of Jesus, "My Lord and my God." That was the confession of the apostle Paul in Romans 10:9 when he wrote one must "confess with his/her mouth that Jesus is Lord." And in fact, "Jesus is Lord" became the earliest and most succinct Christian confession. To confess Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge Jesus' ministry as the supreme prophet, priest and king. More than that, to confess Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge his divine being. It is to say Jesus is more than just a good man,

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moral exemplar, or prophetic and apocalyptic voice. It is to say he is worthy of all the worship and glory which is due to God alone.

This confession was difficult to muster in the first century, and it remains difficult to confess in our own day. There are many voices both within the church and without, who would call us to lower our estimation of the person of Christ. They would call us to acknowledge the humanity of Jesus and that alone. They would tell us Jesus is worthy of respect and admiration as a noble figure, but certainly not to be worshiped as God. They speak of the divide between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. Yet the New Testament challenge of following Jesus is as clear now as it was when it was first written. If we would claim to acknowledge and confess Jesus at all, it must be a confession of Jesus as the Christ, Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus as Lord.

And yet there is even more required of a confession of Christ than acknowledging Christ's exalted person. We can see this if we continue on in the Matthew 16 passage. After Peter correctly confesses the person of Christ, he proceeds to run afoul with Jesus. When Jesus reveals his unique mission, that of dying on the cross and being raised from the dead, Peter objects and he cries out, "Never!" Jesus' response to Peter is most unusual and striking: "get behind me Satan, you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of people."

For Jesus, it is not enough to acknowledge his exalted and divine person. One must also confess his salvific work—his mission. And that mission is, first and foremost, to die for the sin of the world and to be raised from the dead to give eternal life to those who would believe in him. This is why Paul follows "one must confess that Jesus is Lord," in Romans 10:9, with the statement "one must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead."

Again, this is a confession often challenged in our world. Some would gladly confess Jesus as Lord, as long as Jesus' mission is reduced to feeding the poor, healing the sick, helping those who find themselves caught in unjust social structures, or extending a loving embrace to the rejected of society. The Lordship of Christ is all right as long as it is not linked to the "messiness" of a sacrificial death for sin, or an "impossible" resurrection from the dead.

However, to acknowledge the exalted person of Christ without the exalted work of Christ, or vice versa, is really no acknowledgment at all. I fear Christ's response to such efforts in the 21st century is the same as it was in the 1st, "get behind me Satan, you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of people." We must confess Jesus as the Lord who died for us and rose from the grave.

And this confession cannot only be something we do in the quiet of our own hearts or the comfort of our own room. It must also be a public confession. It must be a confession we make before others, a confession made in the pew, in the school, at the office and the casual social gathering. This is why Paul says in Romans 10:9 it must be a confession confessed *with the mouth* and believed *in the heart*. Jesus is concerned with the content of our confession of him as well as the location and public nature of that confession.

However, Jesus is not only concerned with our theology. Having pointed out the importance of our confession of him, Jesus points out the importance of our *actions* lining up with our *confession*. If we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior then, as his disciples, we must love him as the uncontested lord and savior of our lives. Jesus knows all too well that one cannot have two masters—either he/she will love the one and hate the other or vice versa. Thus, Jesus demands of his disciples that if we acknowledge him as Lord, we must love him as the Lord and we must give him the allegiance due to him as Lord.

That allegiance and love says, "I love you above all else and I will obey and follow you above all else." This is an awesome challenge because we live in a world that does *not* acknowledge or love Jesus as Lord. Everything in our world vies for our love and our allegiance. Our nationalities, our ethnicities, our economic communities, our friends, our families and, yes, sometimes even our churches cry out to us, "Put me first!"

Yet, none of these are to be our Lords. We can love them and show some allegiance to them, but we must recognize they are always to be secondary loves and provisional allegiances. When we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, we must recognize that our allegiance is conditional upon a greater commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. If our nation calls us to act in such a way that jeopardizes our

commitment to Christ we have to respond with a clear and defiant “No!” If our ethnic brothers and sisters ever call us to have a greater commitment to them then to our brothers and sisters in the church of Jesus Christ, we must respond with a defiant, “No!” And if our families call on us to put them first, we must be clear that there can only be one “first,” and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It would be nice to live in a world where our commitments to our nations, ethnic groups, friends and families wouldn’t clash with our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, thankfully, there is often no contradiction between being a “good citizen,” “loyal friend” or “devoted son” and being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

However, often the real world comes crashing in on our desires. Parents sometimes disown their children for converting to Christianity. Friends sometimes ostracize “one of the gang” because a commitment to Christ means one can’t engage in the old patterns of entertainment. Ethnic groups sometimes slur their own when the faithful disciple of Christ reaches out to the hated other. Nations sometimes imprison and execute their own citizens when a commitment to Christ means one cannot abide by the laws of the land.

Sometimes hard choices have to be made. Sometimes relationships must be broken. But on all occasions Jesus Christ is to be loved and followed first and foremost. Jesus is a jealous Lord and will not allow his Lordship to be shared. We can have no other Lord’s before him, we can have no greater loves.

The final requirement Jesus lays on his disciples in this passage is that his disciples must offer sacrificial obedience. We must confess Jesus’ as Lord and Savior, we must love him and give allegiance to him as the only Lord and Savior of our lives, and we must follow Jesus as Lord of all we do. In following Jesus we must imitate his life, we must, as he says, take up our cross and follow him. Let us not forget at this moment the scandalous and painful nature of Christ’s words. In the Roman world there was no more barbaric, ugly and shameful image than the cross. Reserved for heinous criminals and traitors, no one willingly took up the cross.

Except, that is, for Jesus. Jesus said, “Nobody takes my life from me, I willingly lay it down.” Oh, did he

ever! He willingly laid it down, he took up the cross, he despised the shame and offered himself as a once-and-for-all sacrifice to satisfy divine justice in our place. Now *that* is an act of sacrificial atonement. That’s one we can never imitate or duplicate, but that’s not what Jesus is asking us to do as his disciples. What he *is* asking us to do is, as the apostle Paul says, to have “the same mind as Christ Jesus.” A mind expressed in complete self-giving, in not grasping or exploiting what is ours “by right,” in not demanding our own way, in serving and considering others better than ourselves, in turning the other cheek, in loving our enemies, in doing good to those who hate us. And it means living this way even when the world turns against you. Even when you are persecuted, even when you are reviled, even when you are forced to suffer and endure hardship.

The Scriptures are clear: suffering and hardship will come in this life as a result of confessing Christ as Lord, loving him as the absolute Lord and obeying and imitating him with our lives.

This does not make suffering a good—far from it. But it does mean we should not live our lives with the avoidance of suffering as the goal. Only those who “give up their lives” by confessing and loving Jesus as the absolute Savior and Lord, and commit to following and imitating Jesus’ self-sacrifice in all they do—even to the point of suffering—only those will receive the abundant life that comes from fellowship with Christ. As Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

These are Christ’s requirements for his disciples. They are clear and challenging. I think I would be a failure as a preacher if I did not hold them up and call us to live accordingly.

Yet, I think I would also be a failure as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ if I did not also try to speak to another issue, “What happens when we fail?” Because fail we *have*, and fail we *do*, and fail we *will*. This, after all, is no small chore. If this is Christ’s pre-game talk, I am tempted to look for another team where I might actually be able to meet the requirements. So what exactly do we do when we fail to confess Jesus as Lord before people? What do we do when we fail to make him our greatest love and absolute lord? What do we do when we fail to obey in all circumstances because

the pain is too great. We hear Christ's words that we are not worthy of him and we can only cry out, "The yoke is too heavy, we cannot do it!"

It is in this moment we are comforted with Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and you shall find rest, take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

But what about all of the rigorous requirements? Does Jesus not really care about that after all?

Yes, he cares about it more than we can ever know. The Lord is holy and he calls us to an uncompromising life of holy obedience. But what about the easy yoke? Does Jesus have both an easy yoke and a hard one? No, brothers and sisters. The beauty of following Jesus is that the hard yoke and the easy yoke are one and the same. Christ calls us to holiness, but in striving to be holy we fail. However, in that sin and failure we are called to repent. And because of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ's taking up the cross, dying for our failure and sin, and being raised from the dead, when we repent we find forgiveness. We find mercy. We find grace.

But here is the amazing thing about that grace. God's grace does not free us from the obligations of holiness and radical obedience. No, the paradox of following Christ is that the experience of his grace in the moments of sin and repentance actually *empowers us* to live the holy, obedient lives he calls us to live, and it makes that life a joy and pleasure to live. For the grace of God doesn't just accept you for who you are. No, the grace of God accepts you *in spite of* who you are, on the basis of *who Christ is*, for the purpose of making you into *who you are supposed to be*.

This is the call of Christ: radical and uncompromising obedience, yet with abundant grace in the face of our sin, making that life not only possible but joyous, liberating and restful to our souls. I pray we will accept that call.

Amen.



Reviews

The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America

by Mark Lewis Taylor
Fortress Press, 2001. 208 pages

reviewed by James McCullough

In his book *Soul of the World*, Catholic ethicist George Weigel reflects on his involvement with American Catholic social thought in the 1970's and early 80's. The dominant fashion among Catholic intellectuals in this period, according to Weigel, was to adopt a "prophetic" stance against America and its "racist, militarist, [and] imperialist" foreign and domestic policies. In time, Weigel came to find himself alienated from many of his fellow travelers, increasingly finding such positions, for all the sincerity with which they were held, ultimately proved "overwrought, ungrateful, and intellectually unsatisfying."

Many of the positions Weigel speaks of are still actively advanced, of course, now directing their discontent toward globalization, enduring racial conflicts, and a far from perfect American criminal justice system. Mark Taylor's new book *The Executed God*, presents these themes in what is ostensibly

a book about the criminal justice system, but is more of an ideological treatise on the perceived reality and future threat of an all-encompassing economic order sponsored by an American political and military hegemony.

The appeal of the book lies in an artful blend of conspiracy theory, rhetorical flourish, and a sweeping style of argumentation based on a rather selective scope of historical and contemporary instantiation. Taylor seems to recognize his vulnerability to such criticisms and seeks at several points to pre-empt them, but the book nonetheless employs this type of argumentation throughout.

In Taylor's narrative, the United States is a kind of totalitarian state, characterized by systemic police brutality, a "prison industrial complex" (the most recent rhetorical form of the older "military-industrial complex"), and a racist regime of incarceration and capital punishment. These however, are but the tip of deeper forces of control emanating from newly emerging "global corporate gambits" that are but the most recent progeny of capitalism in particular and the Western cultural tradition in general. Taylor sees the U. S. as both the site of some of capitalism's worst

atrocities and the chief sponsor, through its economic and military might, of its spread throughout the world. Taylor's global view is that of capitalist rule via the nightstick, the barrel of a gun and the jail cell.

Closer to home, practices of brutality and prison construction multiply because of the "need to control faction and rebellion" amongst those left out of capitalism's benefits at a time when the "unequal distribution of property and general economic disparity have reached greater, nearly unmanageable levels." Moreover, this growing attack upon the most vulnerable is passed on to a placated general populace who are lulled into political somnambulism by the manipulation of public airwaves. "Powerful groups in our society thus invest heavily to create media and other cultural mechanisms of control," which wreak violence upon the minds and, when necessary, on the bodies of those who would resist the order.

Taylor's narrative presents a comprehensive explanation for a complex of issues based on the premise of a coordinated effort of elusive but nonetheless real human agencies. And like thought-out conspiracy theories

of both the left and right, Taylor's perspective appeals to certain surface plausibilities in its argument, and welds them into a circular hermeneutic that is highly resistant to evidential falsification. Any evidence or argument presented to the contrary is simply absorbed into the theory, either as evidence of the "lie" being perpetrated, or as coming from those too deeply implicated in the situation to be objective about it.

However, to accomplish this Taylor's narrative relies on strong doses of rhetorical manipulation, with frequent use of slogans and code words shared among like-minded contemporary social critics. The conspiracy of economic globalization represents the imperialistic aspirations of Western capitalism now thriving under the protective canopy of a Pax Americana. Under these conditions of empire, our once familiar democracy is declining into a "Gulag America", a "Big House Nation" run by "legalized vigilante men" (the police) where "The death penalty in the United States can be seen as the paradigmatic action of a political theatrics of terror that is disseminated throughout U.S. life at the turn of the century."

In Mark Taylor's work one encounters a litany of the crimes of the West, of capitalism, and of the U. S. in particular. Slavery, incarceration, and capital punishment are presented as "necessary to the efficiency of Western culture and economy." However, why slavery, incarceration, and capital punishment were practiced long before the inception of western society and its capitalist economy

existed is never explained. Nor, more importantly, is it explained why it is typically Western values and agencies that promote the eradication of some of the worst vices of economic, social and political injustices around the world. One also reads repeatedly of Americas' involvement in Argentina's Dirty War, of the ongoing situation in Chiapas, Mexico, and, of course, of the racial disparities in the American criminal justice system, but never about places like Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, Cuba under Castro,

years, and sometimes executed, for the mildest infractions. American slavery is rightly denounced, while the slavery that takes place in our own day in places like the Sudan are never mentioned. And while Taylor protests the "expendability" of racial minorities and the poor in "lockdown America," he has nothing to say of the far more expendable population of the unborn in this country, where far more millions have been "executed" under the exigencies of the Roe v. Wade regime than will ever be by capital punishment.

In keeping with his political tradition, Taylor is not only extremely critical of those forces and ideas openly identified with conservatism, but of liberalism and the liberal church as well. Taylor hardly contains his disdain for the "polite liberal faiths" and their efforts at "organizing charity and philanthropy." For Taylor, it is the System that is the problem, and it is the System that must be overthrown. However, Taylor provides little or no detail with respect to what might replace the System once it is gone. Taylor does, however, caution against an uncritical embrace of what he calls "revolutionary purism" (read old-style Marxism) that once aspired toward a "conflagrationalism" and urges them to adopt a chastened revolutionary ethos that uses the Internet and even "gets its hands dirty with big capital and things like the credit card and bank accounts."

The book is, of course, entitled *The Executed God* and consequently presents itself as not merely a social critique, but as a work of theology and Christian

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the Soviet Union (where the phrase "gulag" originates), or the repressions of other (formerly) Warsaw Bloc nations.

There appears to be a skewed perspective when the detention of young middle class protestors in places like Philadelphia is decried, while nothing is said of places like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia where people are detained for

social ethics. Taylor freely acknowledges his indebtedness to theological predecessors like Jurgen Moltmann, from whom the title is obviously borrowed, and Paul Tillich, from whom Taylor derives his basic theological language. Taylor is also particularly indebted for his New Testament scholarship to a few select sources, John Dominic Crossan prominent among them.

However, there appears to be little drawn upon from research of the New Testament or Early Church apart from this select group, and absolutely no reading of primary sources for the Early Church and its relation to the Roman Empire, such as the letters of Ignatius, the works of Clement, the *Didache*, or the *Letter to Diognetus*.

Moreover, while Taylor criticizes the way that Western Christendom has led to an "abstraction" of the crucifixion of Jesus from its concrete historical setting and political significance, he seems to be either unaware, or at ease, with his reduction of *God* to an abstraction. In his generalist understanding of God, "God" appears to be merely a Tillichian nomination for "life's power to persist and transform."

Nor, as noted above, does Taylor present many helpful insights in terms of how society should actually be ordered. No theologically coherent account for the existence and exercise of authority as a created good seems to be offered—only a Foucaultian narrative about the relationship between punishment and social order. Considerations of economy

are reduced to how money gets one's hands dirty. Western civilization is deprecated, but constructive reflections on the grounding and maintenance of civil society are few.

The positive content of Taylor's book is the strong, and at times poignant, reminder that the Gospel does profoundly relativise all claims of earthly sovereignty, and that Christians are called, in whatever role or position in which they find themselves, to maintain an appropriately critical relationship toward the institutions and exercise of power and economic distribution. But one can strongly criticize the current trend of abuses within the legal and criminal justice system without having to adopt Taylor's politics of resentment.

Kierkegaard: A Biography

by Alastair Hannay
Cambridge University Press,
510 pages

reviewed by Timothy Dalrymple

Søren Kierkegaard's writings are a brilliant example of the creative and generative power of faith to address philosophical as well as theological concerns. The irony of Kierkegaard's legacy is that his various contributions to philosophical dialogue have been duly recognized, but the life of faith which made these contributions possible has been virtually ignored. The interpretation of

Kierkegaard which gained prevalence in late-nineteenth century Germany was so thoroughly secularized that August Strindberg admired Kierkegaard for years before discovering, with evident disgust, that the Danish thinker had been Christian. The ideas of this obscure thinker from a philosophical and political backwater were disseminated into the mainstream through secular channels that were disinterested or even dismissive of his religious ideas. Even in the majority of contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship, the "esthetic" writings are welcomed by various scholarly movements while the "religious" writings, if they are mentioned, are interpreted in the light of the former.

It is the weakness of Alastair Hannay's *Kierkegaard: A Biography* that it reinforces this secularizing hermeneutical tendency, but it is its strength that it does so with consummate skill and scholarship. Hannay's research is meticulous and his mastery of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings is formidable; the quality of the present work matches or exceeds that of his earlier Kierkegaard translations and treaties. It is Hannay's great accomplishment that he has provided a coherent and compelling portrait of a profoundly complicated thinker, deeply embedding Kierkegaard within the rich world of Golden Age Denmark. The subtle relationships between Kierkegaard's writings and his personal life are examined in such detail that the distinction between the two finally dissolves. Certainly, Hannay presents his biography with such proficiency

that it will be at the center of Kierkegaard scholarship for years to come.

The stated intention of the work is "to collect the *disjecta membra* of [Kierkegaard's] life and work in the light of some idea of what it was that drove him to write." Hannay's primary thesis is that Kierkegaard's life was a "self-written and self-produced stage-piece in which his own writings were the lines." The plot is driven by a series of "collisions" that force

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Kierkegaard to redefine his character and redirect history. The mental and spiritual anguish of Kierkegaard's break with Regine Olsen compelled him to seek a transcendent justification for his action. The ethical suspension of *Fear and Trembling* is essentially an attempt to find "some objective and not purely selfish basis for breaking off his engagement with Regine," and its concept of faith in virtue of the absurd is a thinly-veiled longing for a higher recon-

ciliation with his beloved. Thus, Kierkegaard developed his religious perspective because the ethical perspective offered him no justification for his actions and no hope for a spiritual union. Later collisions were similar: Kierkegaard's humiliation by the satirical periodical *The Corsair* drove him to radicalize his understanding of the single individual over and against the crowd and to focus intently on religious sacrifice and martyrdom, while his dispute with the representatives of institutionalized Christendom transformed his life into the living and dying expression of these themes.

Hannay's account is neither fully wrong nor fully inconsistent with Kierkegaard's own interpretation of his development. However, they are woefully reductionistic and fail to understand Kierkegaard's life and writings in their richly dialectical relationship. For example, Hannay describes Kierkegaard's defense of religion as an attempt "to make the people's religion of his father tough enough to withstand speculative philosophy," the religious discourses as attempts to impress his contemporaries and secure a job, and his pursuit of martyrdom as an effort to convince "not just others but himself too" that his religious pursuit "had not all been vanity, indulgence, an excuse." Certainly Kierkegaard's understanding of his religious vocation was refined and deepened in relation to events in his personal life, but those events were interpreted by the religious categories he had already developed. The ideas presented in Kierkegaard's religious writings

were not *merely* a response to his experiences, but were themselves his basis for understanding those experiences. Louis Dupre observed fifty years ago that Kierkegaard's psychological constitution was not the origin, but the necessary condition for his religious philosophy, and that it "should be explained in the light of his writings, for it is essentially subordinated to the reality with which they are concerned."

Having dismissed Kierkegaard's religious writings and beliefs as creative coping mechanisms, Hannay is free to spend the great majority of his biography focused upon Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel and other philosophers of his day. Kierkegaard begins to look suspiciously like a modern secular philosopher, leaping from one esoteric dispute to another without an overarching religious vision that unifies and gives significance to such questions.

For example, Hannay meticulously details Kierkegaard's relationship to Hegel and Heiberg, but his interactions with the scriptures, the reformers, the pietists and the mystics are scarcely even mentioned. It is remarkable that a biography of an individual so thoroughly steeped in the Lutheran tradition mentions Luther only four times and devotes more attention to *Either/Or* than to the entirety of Kierkegaard's explicitly religious writings.

Most telling, Hannay never examines Kierkegaard's religious discourses in any detail. Although the religious discourses constitute roughly half of Kierkegaard's

entire authorship, and the great majority of them were published under his own name, they are excluded from Hannay's biography. Hannay notes when the volumes were published, but mentions only one specific discourse by name, and there is only one quotation in the entire biography attributed to anything written in the discourses—as it happens, the same discourse. This indicates either Hannay's disinterest in this aspect of Kierkegaard's life and writings, or his rejection of their significance. Hannay's hermeneutic is unable to account for fully half of Kierkegaard's authorship, and surely this casts doubt on its ability to present Kierkegaard in a balanced and nuanced manner. A portrait of Kierkegaard cannot discard the religious discourses without gravely distorting his image. As C. Stephen Evans and David J. Gouwens have recently argued, Kierkegaard is a decisively religious author and his writings must be understood as such.

What is needed is not so much an exclusively religious interpretation of Kierkegaard's life and writings, but a new interpretive method that can understand the rich variety of his life and writings together. It is certainly possible that Kierkegaard's production is essentially fragmented, but this scarcely justifies ignoring so many of the author's published writings. More specifically, an intellectual biographer may omit numerous texts from his account, but to omit *all* of the texts of an *explicitly religious character*, without justification or even comment, mitigates

against a holistic and faithful interpretation of the subject. This is but a symptom of the secularizing hermeneutical influenza that has infected academic culture. When religious thinkers such as Kierkegaard are deprived of their religious dimensions, the genesis and structure of their thought are incompletely understood. Attractive both to secular and religious thinkers, Kierkegaard's legacy has fallen prey to a fetishized secularity that is reflective of the apparent spiritlessness of contemporary philosophical dialogue. It is regrettable that Hannay's considerable academic skill only served to reinforce one of the most unfortunate tendencies in modern Kierkegaard scholarship.



Finale

Finding The Unholy Grail

He sank so low that all means
 For his salvation were gone,
 Except showing him the lost people.
 For this I visited the region of the dead...

—Purgatorio

Dante's lines serve as an epigraph for Walker Percy's *Lancelot*, a fierce novel grounded upon the conviction that in our search for God there may be times when an incontestable evil or even an honest hatred serves us better than a love corrupted by sentimentality or sententiousness. The story finds Percy's wayfarer in the darkest night of the soul, yet Lancelot is the inverted pilgrim, who searches not for God but for absolute evil. Echoing his allusive ancestor, Lancelot's own quest is for the "Unholy Grail—one sin, one pure act of malevolence." He hopes to prove that life has meaning only if certain conduct is wrong, and not merely "sick" or in bad taste. As he puts it, "God may be absent, but what if one should find the devil?" Talk of God's absence has been on the lips of many in the wake of September 11, both saint and skeptic. Human beings plunging to their death, planes crashing into crowded buildings, the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers—the exhibitions of evil have united our pluralistic nation in a chorus of indignation and inquisition: "Where was God?"

Two of the most common Christian responses have been (1) God was absent, and (2) God didn't cause the World Trade Center disaster, but God can use it for good. Like a half-completed puzzle, both have elements of truth but neither can satisfy the three essential components of a Christian response: the reality of evil, the presence of God and the promise of hope.

William Styron captured the pith of the first alternative in his novel *Sophie's Choice*. He recounts the

tortured involvement of Stingo, a young Southerner journeying north in 1947 to become a writer, with his neighbor, Sophie, a beautiful Polish woman with a number tattooed on her arm and an unbearable secret in her past. Stingo comes to learn that Sophie's choice was put to her by an SS doctor at Auschwitz. "You may keep one of your children...the other one will have to go. Which one will you keep?" The effects of this decision destroy not only Sophie's life but Stingo's innocence. The final pages of the novel record his reflections:

Someday I will understand Auschwitz. This was a brave statement but innocently absurd. No one will ever understand Auschwitz. What I might have set down with more accuracy would have been: *Someday I will write about Sophie's life and death, and thereby help demonstrate how absolute evil is never extinguished from the world.* Auschwitz itself remains inexplicable. The most profound statement yet made about Auschwitz was not a statement at all, but a response.

The query: "At Auschwitz, tell me, where was God?"

And the answer: "Where was man?"

That the planes crashed into the monuments of our military might and financial prosperity portrays the paradoxical potential in the heart of man: inside this image of God can beat a heart of darkness. To leave the matter here, however, is to beg the question, as if the Father were absent while the children burned down the house.

Yet, Styron does point out something usually lost in the aftermath of calamity. Strikingly, in the midst of this absolute evil, Stingo uncovers a spiritual impetus, concluding that the doctor's action was "essentially

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religious." The doctor realized that the absence of sin and the absence of God were inseparably intertwined. "All of his depravity had been enacted in a vacuum of sinless and businesslike godlessness, while his soul thirsted for beatitude." Thus, perversely, to restore his belief in God, he must affirm his capacity for evil by committing the most intolerable sin that he is able to conceive. Styron underscores the relationship between the reality of evil and the presence of God—both are spiritual categories. Yet, no attempt is made to offer hope, and just as Stingo must continue to write, as pastors we must continue to preach.

The second alternative "God did not cause the World Trade Center, but God can use it for good," moves beyond the first. It ultimately points to the resurrection as God's triumph over sin and death. And some who deny that God "caused" the calamity are motivated by admirable principles, desiring to preserve the goodness of God and the responsibility of humans. That God works in spite of our sins for redemptive purposes is true and glorious, a precious cornerstone of our faith. Yet, I suspect the mindset behind many who utter these words is that it would be entirely contrary to the character of God if He would ever act in such a way as to bring about calamity. It is this view of God that not only contradicts Scripture, but undermines the very hope it wants to protect.

How a sovereign God orchestrates every event of a fallen world for His own glory and for the good of His children, without sinning and without removing accountability from us, is an insoluble mystery. Yet, that is what Scripture teaches. From the ashes of Jerusalem, the author of Lamentations asks, "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" (3:37-38). God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11) from small things such as the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the casting of lots (Jonah 1:7), and the rolling of dice (Prov. 16:33) to larger things like the suffering of his saints (1 Peter

4:19), the destruction of his people (Psalm 44:11), and the decimation of their cities (Amos 3:6). And we have questions just as the prophet Habakkuk had, "O Lord, your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 2:13). I am neither dismissing the necessity of the questions nor am I trying to trace specifically the events of September 11 to the sins of our country—that would make me guilty of the presumption of Job's friends. I'm only saying we should not attempt to reconcile the dilemma by contravening Scripture that insists upon God's sovereignty in all things.

An equally important reason that I can not endorse the second alternative is that it eviscerates the very hope it wants to create. I'm amazed that from the same lips that deny God's presence on September 11 are invocations of His presence now to protect, preserve, and sustain us. However theologically appealing it might be to absolve God of any involvement, I wonder how comforting it is to those of us who remain that God is captive to the caprices of those who would transgress his will. As if God were some sort of benevolent cosmic nanny cleaning up behind obdurate children. The God of

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Harold Kushner may be with us in our suffering, but a God not able to prevent evil is finally impotent to give us credible hope here and now. Indeed, a skeptic might wonder, "If God would not use the past to save 6,000 people in their hour of trial, what confidence do I have that God can now use this tragedy to protect me in the future?" We say we believe God can use these events for good, but we deny that he could have used the events of the past to hold back the evil of September 11. To paraphrase Job, we accept good from God and not trouble (2:10). If we spare God the burden of his sovereignty, we lose our only hope.

So, how can Christian ministers acknowledge the reality of evil, the presence of God and the promise of hope? We point to a Person, to his cross and to his

empty tomb. Peter's speech at the Temple in Acts captures the sentiment. Peter in no way minimizes the absolute evil behind the crucifixion of Jesus; he condemns his audience: "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate...you killed the author of life" (3:13-15). Yet, Peter does not minimize the presence of God. "Brothers I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer" (3:17-18). And Peter goes further to offer hope. "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead...repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out" (3:15,19). Upon hearing of Peter's faithful proclamation of the salvation and sovereignty of God in the face of sin, the fledgling church proclaims in prayer:

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them...Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen (Acts 4:24-28).

Luke, the author of Acts, does not compromise the sovereignty of God in affirming God's triumph over sin and death by the cross. God not only works in spite of our sin, but *through* it redemptively. In the wake of September 11, when people ask, "Where was God?" We dare to point to a crucified criminal. How will God work redemptively through these events? I cannot answer. I do not know. I only know that the cross serves as God's enduring promise that He works through suffering for his glory and our good. In light of the empty tomb, we persevere, believing that "the revelation awaits an appointed time. It speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it...the righteous will live by faith" (Hab. 2:3-4). And sometimes living by faith means trusting in the sovereignty of God when all evidences point to the contrary (see Hab. 3:16-19).

But until that day, we must continue to preach the radical sovereignty of God in light of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not blinking in the face of evil, but like Lancelot and Stingo, looking for the

spiritual reality of God in the face of finding the unholy grail. To a society who may have sunk so low that all means of its salvation are gone, we may have to begin by pointing to the lost people of lower Manhattan and the region of the dead. Not diminishing the presence of God, but like Peter and Luke, trusting that God works in and through our sins and sufferings, the cross being the lens that renders all other events intelligible. Not resigning ourselves to stoical acceptance, but like Habakkuk, daring to stand in faith on the ramparts, clinging to the promises of God. Though it linger, wait for it. For sometimes, as Flannery O'Connor once said, the only way to truth is through blasphemy.



